



THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH

## Edinburgh Research Explorer

### ASAR: visual analysis of metagenomes in R

**Citation for published version:**

Orakov, A, Sakenova, N, Sorokin, A & Goryanin, I 2018, 'ASAR: visual analysis of metagenomes in R', *Bioinformatics*, vol. 34, no. 8, pp. 1404–1405. <https://doi.org/10.1093/bioinformatics/btx775>

**Digital Object Identifier (DOI):**

[10.1093/bioinformatics/btx775](https://doi.org/10.1093/bioinformatics/btx775)

**Link:**

[Link to publication record in Edinburgh Research Explorer](#)

**Document Version:**

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

**Published In:**

Bioinformatics

**Publisher Rights Statement:**

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits unrestricted reuse, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

**General rights**

Copyright for the publications made accessible via the Edinburgh Research Explorer is retained by the author(s) and / or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing these publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

**Take down policy**

The University of Edinburgh has made every reasonable effort to ensure that Edinburgh Research Explorer content complies with UK legislation. If you believe that the public display of this file breaches copyright please contact [openaccess@ed.ac.uk](mailto:openaccess@ed.ac.uk) providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.



## Genome analysis

# ASAR: visual analysis of metagenomes in R

Askarbek N. Orakov<sup>1,2,\*†</sup>, Nazgul K. Sakenova<sup>1,2,†</sup>, Anatoly Sorokin<sup>3,4,†</sup>  
and Igor I. Goryanin<sup>1,5,6,\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Biological Systems Unit, Okinawa Institute of Science and Technology, Onna-son 904–0412, Japan, <sup>2</sup>Department of Biology, School of Science and Technology, Nazarbayev University, Astana 010000, Kazakhstan, <sup>3</sup>Mechanism of Cell Genome Functioning Laboratory, Institute of Cell Biophysics RAS, Pushchino 142290, Russia, <sup>4</sup>Laboratory of Ion and Molecular Physics, Moscow Institute of Physics and Technology, Dolgoprudny, Moscow 141701, Russia, <sup>5</sup>School of Informatics, University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh EH8 9AB, UK and <sup>6</sup>Biodesign Centre, Tianjin Institute of Industrial Biotechnology, Tianjin 300308, China

\*To whom correspondence should be addressed.

†The authors wish it to be known that, in their opinion, the first two authors should be regarded as Joint First Authors.

Associate Editor: Bonnie Berger

Received on August 8, 2017; revised on November 1, 2017; editorial decision on November 24, 2017; accepted on November 30, 2017

## Abstract

**Motivation:** Functional and taxonomic analyses are critical steps in understanding interspecific interactions within microbial communities. Currently, such analyses are run separately, which complicates interpretation of results. Here we present the ASAR interactive tool for simultaneous analysis of metagenomic data in three dimensions: taxonomy, function, metagenome.

**Results:** An interactive data analysis tool for selection, aggregation and visualization of metagenomic data is presented. Functional analysis with a SEED hierarchy and pathway diagram based on KEGG orthology based upon MG-RAST annotation results is available.

**Availability and implementation:** Source code of the ASAR is accessible at GitHub (<https://github.com/Askarbek-orakov/ASAR>).

**Contact:** askarbek.orakov@nu.edu.kz or goryanin@gmail.com

## 1 Introduction

Metagenomics allows investigation of microbial communities in a culture-independent way, taking advantage of the fact that estimated 99% of prokaryotes have not been successfully cultured (Schloss and Handelsman, 2005). In addition, the decreasing cost of sequencing and the increasing throughput of metagenomic data generation make the development of tools for functional, taxonomic and metabolic analyses of metagenomes extremely important (Hugenholtz and Tyson, 2008; Lindgreen *et al.*, 2016). However, even the most useful extant metagenomic analysis tools provide either only taxonomic (Menzel *et al.*, 2016) or only functional (Westbrook *et al.*, 2017) or both, but separately (Keegan *et al.*, 2016).

Although currently, annotations cannot be performed impeccably, crosslinking taxonomic and functional annotations at the read level could resolve many important questions, such as which taxonomic group in a sample is the main contributor to a particular function or metabolic pathway. Moreover, the capacity to analyze

changes in microbiomes in the context of metabolic networks and to find the most interesting pathways, i.e. those most changed are the critical requirements for understanding biotechnological processes and would considerably improve analysis. These challenges have been addressed in ASAR (Advanced metagenomic Sequence Analysis in R). The core advantage of ASAR is its ability to perform taxonomic and functional analyses simultaneously, by subsetting and aggregating abundance data at various levels of taxonomic and functional hierarchies. It is designed to let researchers develop the most meaningful view of their data in a convenient way.

## 2 Materials and methods

The ASAR application was written in the R programming language (R Core Team, 2014) on the Shiny platform (Chang *et al.*, 2016). The application can both be used locally on machines with installed R or as a web-service.

Sequencing and annotation data are combined to form a 3D data cube (Kimball, 1996) with taxonomy, function and metagenome

as dimensions. Interactively applying selection and aggregation operations at a user defined level, we provide an interactive interface for drill-down analysis of metagenomic data. For analysis, we combine the ‘best hit’ functional and taxonomic classification from SEED (Overbeek, 2005) and the ‘best hit’ functional classification from KEGG orthology (Kanehisa et al., 2016) provided by MG-RAST (Keegan et al., 2016). At the moment, we use the annotation files from MG-RAST, but any other annotation pipeline that assigns annotations at the read level could be incorporated as well. A detailed description of data preparation is available in the [Supplementary Material](#).

## 3 Results

The ASAR interface consists of a main panel with seven tabs and a control panel. The control panel provides a set of parameter selectors to control the displayed tab content. When tabs share the same set of parameter inputs, these are maintained when moving across tabs to analyze different projections of the same data subset.

Users can select a color scheme for heatmaps from the RColorBrewer package (Neuwirth, 2014). All heatmaps and KEGG diagrams in the ASAR are downloadable as a high-resolution, publication quality images in PDF or PNG formats.

### 3.1 Three-dimensional dataset visualization

The combination of taxonomic and functional annotations in several metagenomic samples form a three-dimensional data cube, where each cell represents those reads mapped to a particular function and taxon in a particular metagenome. We have implemented the interactive tool for visual analysis of data cube contents by applying selection, aggregation and projection operations and by representing two-dimensional projections of selected subsets of the data cube as heatmaps. Taxonomic and functional dimensions are organized into a hierarchy, so the user can specify the level at which to select and aggregate data. All reads annotated with a chosen value at a selected level of a hierarchy are collected and aggregated according to their annotation at the aggregated level. In the metagenomic dimension, each metagenome is annotated with a set of user-defined metadata properties. So for this dimension, aggregation is implemented by averaging data that belongs to metagenomes with the same values at a selected property. The combination of operations described above allows precise selection of data together with concise and interpretable visualization.

#### 3.1.1 Function versus Taxonomy heatmap

This heatmap projects a data cube along the metagenomic dimension by combining functional and taxonomic data for single metagenome. This is useful for discovering the relationship between functions and taxonomic groups in a given metagenome.

#### 3.1.2 Function versus Metagenome heatmap

This heatmap projects a data cube along the taxonomic dimension by aggregating abundance data for a specified set of taxa. This is designed to compare abundances of functional groups in selected taxonomic groups between metagenomes.

#### 3.1.3 Taxonomy versus Metagenome heatmap

This heatmap projects a data cube along the functional dimension by aggregating the abundances of selected functional groups.

It converges to standard taxonomic analysis if the root of the functional hierarchy is selected. This heatmap is designed for exploration of taxonomic groups that differ in abundance within selected metagenomes.

### 3.2 KEGG pathway abundance analysis

The KEGG Pathway Abundance heatmap shows pathways with genes that differ most in abundance for selected taxonomic groups and samples. The pathway diagram can be visualized in the KEGG Diagram tab with genes color coded by the pathview package (Luo and Brouwer, 2013). The color of each enzyme on the KEGG diagram represents the percentage of enzyme abundance provided by selected taxa in each metagenome. This allows estimation of the role of selected taxa in providing this function to the whole microbial community.

## Acknowledgements

Okinawa Institute Science Technology (OIST) Sequencing Section for NGS, Members of Biological Systems Unit and Dr. Irina Khilyas for experimental data and initial analysis.

## Funding

This work was supported by the Okinawa Institute of Science and Technology. Winter internship of A.N.O. and N.K.S was funded by Shakhmardan Yessenov Foundation Private Fund and School of Science and Technology at Nazarbayev University.

*Conflict of Interest:* none declared.

## References

- Chang, W. et al. (2016) shiny: Web Application Framework for R. R package version 0.13.1.
- Hugenholtz, P. and Tyson, G.W. (2008) Microbiology: metagenomics. *Nature*, **455**, 481–483.
- Kanehisa, M. et al. (2016) KEGG as a reference resource for gene and protein annotation. *Nucleic Acids Res.*, **44**, D457–D462.
- Keegan, K.P. et al. (2016) MG-RAST, a metagenomics service for analysis of microbial community structure and function. *Methods Mol. Biol.*, **1399**, 207–233.
- Kimball, R. (1996) *The Data Warehouse Toolkit: Practical Techniques for Building Dimensional Data Warehouse*. John Wiley & Sons, New York, NY, p. 248.
- Lindgreen, S. et al. (2016) An evaluation of the accuracy and speed of metagenome analysis tools. *Sci. Rep.*, **6**, 19233. doi: 10.1038/srep19233.
- Luo, W. and Brouwer, C. (2013) Pathview: an R/Bioconductor package for pathway-based data integration and visualization. *Bioinformatics*, **29**, 1830–1831.
- Menzel, P. et al. (2016) Fast and sensitive taxonomic classification for metagenomics with Kaiju. *Nat. Commun.*, **7**, 11257.
- Neuwirth, E. (2014). RColorBrewer: ColorBrewer palettes. R package version 1.1.
- Overbeek, R. (2005) The subsystems approach to genome annotation and its use in the project to annotate 1000 genomes. *Nucleic Acids Res.*, **33**, 5691–5702.
- R Core Team (2014) *R: A Language and Environment for Statistical Computing*. R Foundation for Statistical Computing, Vienna, Austria.
- Schloss, P.D. and Handelsman, J. (2005) Metagenomics for studying unculturable microorganisms: cutting the Gordian knot. *Genome Biol.*, **6**, 229.
- Westbrook, A. et al. (2017) PALADIN: protein alignment for functional profiling whole metagenome shotgun data. *Bioinformatics*, **33**, 1473–1478.